

Between the Sultan and the Boyars: Gifts in the Power Dynamic of Phanariot Investiture in Wallachia and Moldavia

Abstract:

This paper addresses the ritualized power-balancing act illustrated by investiture ceremonies of what in Romanian historiography are designated as Phanariot princes or *hospodars*. The discussion focuses on the specific gifts exchanged in the highly ritualized transfer of power from the sultan to the Phanariot throne contender in the Danubian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia in the 18th and 19th century. What are the symbols and meanings assigned to these gifts? What does sharing food at the sultan's table and replicating the custom in Wallachia and Moldavia represent in terms of the Ottoman system and the local power dynamic? What do the textiles used in the ceremonial investiture signify in terms of regulating the relation between the sultan and the throne contender? The use of specific markers for each stage has an anthropological value; however, the emphasis on material culture in a symbolical setting would make it more suitable for a cultural history methodology. Given the recent contribution of Romanian scholars on the topic of the mobility of material culture, especially in the confirmation of post-1821 rulers of Moldavia, the paper also engages with how the historiographical discourse has constructed the interval between 1711/1716 and 1821 as a particular historical period.

Keywords: Phanariots, ritual, gifts, rite of passage, power transfer, power dynamic, textiles

1. Introduction

Highly regulated and observing a precise order, the investiture ceremonial¹ of the Phanariot throne contenders involved a great deal of mobility in a symbolic claim to the land. In short, the ceremonial began with the nomination of the candidate by the Grand Vizier, followed by the approval of the sultan through *a mucibince amel oluna*. Next, the candidate was summoned to the Grand Vizier's court to receive his nomination as well as the first *hıl'at* (robe of honor) made from *seraser* (silk fabric woven of metal-wrapped silk thread). Subsequently, the Phanariot appointee presented the credentials of his dragoman and returned with great pomp and a previously agreed upon retinue to his Istanbul court. A significant part of the ritual was the religious blessing given by the Ecumenical Patriarch and the anointment, seen as divine legitimation of the new ruler's claim to power. Afterwards, the new Phanariot *hospodar* received the power insignia (the *tūğs* and *sancak* standards) from the *Mir-alem Ağa*, which had been

1 Rhoads Murphey discusses how the rules for Ottoman officials' nominations were laid down in the *kanunname* of 1676 (drafted by Abdi Pasha) 2008, 228.

prepared for the part of the ritual held at the Imperial Palace. At the Palace, after an audience with the sultan, the candidate received the *kouka* and another *hîl'at*. Following another grandiose return to the Istanbul palace and laden with all the gifts from the sultan and the Grand Vizier, the Phanariot would leave Istanbul after being given the *hîl'at* of farewell by the Grand Vizier. The second part of the ceremonial took place in Bucharest or Jassy.

There is a significant resurgence of interest concerning the existence, the social, political, and diplomatic roles, but, most importantly, the trans-imperial character of a specific group in the Ottoman administration, the Phanariots.² Recent contributions from Romanian scholars³ signal the paradigm shift away from the nationalistic constructed narrative that portrays the 18th century in the provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia as a period of decay and backwardness. Books intended for the non-academic public, such as the ones published by Tudor Dinu, present in an accessible manner the so-called Phanariot period. The mobility of the Ottoman material culture in 18th century Wallachia and Moldavia has predominantly been the focus of Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu's research,⁴ which includes the Phanariot *hospodars* in a larger societal setting. However, the continuous existence and over-use of the chronological unit known as the "Phanariot period" in Romanian historiography, even in Romanian mass media,⁵ together with Bogdan Bucur's book⁶ point to the continued representation of the 18th century and the first decades of 19th century Romanian history as a highly individualized historical period with various negative connotations.⁷ Building on Bogdan Murgescu's ample demonstration on why we cannot speak of a regime change in 1711/1716,⁸ I would argue that an in-depth comparative analysis of the investiture ceremonial with other examples from the Ottoman court, for example the sultan's investiture, would emphasize why we should not view Wallachia and Moldavia as exceptional in the Ottoman system. Moreover, as Can Erimtan's valuable research has outlined,⁹ the Romanian historiography's construction of the Phanariot regime parallels to a certain degree the Turkish historiography perception of the Tulip Age as a distinct period in Ottoman history.

2 On this particular discussion, see Philliou 2011; Janos 2006, 177–97; Rothman 2021.

3 See Vintilă-Ghițulescu 2015.

4 See Vintilă-Ghițulescu 2021 and 2022.

5 With variants such as Epoca fanariotă or Secolul fanariot see Andrei Pogăciaș, 'Secolul fanariot și Țările Române aflate la granița marilor imperii', in *Historia* 2018; the article in a Neo-nationalist publication calls the Black history 'Istoria neagră: epoca fanariotă' in *Națiunea*, February 10, 2019.

6 Bucur 2008.

7 A 2020 exhibition curated at the Bucharest Municipality Museum called 'Bucureștiul medieval al familiei Mavrocordat' (The Medieval Bucharest of the Mavrocordat family) attempts to present a glamorized image of the capital of Wallachia during the first Phanariot reign of the Mavrocordat family and perpetuating the discourse that anything before 1821 belongs in the Middle Age, therefore not progressive or modern.

8 Murgescu 2012, 89–90.

9 Erimtan 2008.

While Petronel Zahariuc's study¹⁰ focuses on the material culture of the investiture ceremonial used for appointing the post-1821 Moldavian *hospodars*, it also falls in the rather common temptation of constructing the year 1821 as a temporal limit between two different political regimes. Presenting similar patterns in the gift exchange and the ritualized naming of what Romanian historiography has dubbed as *domni pământeni*,¹¹ Zahariuc succeeds in demonstrating that the impact on the naming of the Wallachian and Moldavian rulers after the 1821 revolution was not as significant as to speak of a regime change. Although Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu states that the generically named Phanariot regime seems to date before the 18th century, she also argues that 'the eighteenth century brought important changes regarding the structure of the games played on the political stage'.¹² Therefore, a discussion of the material culture of the Phanariot investiture ceremonials could contribute towards clarifying these chronological issues.

2. A Cultural History of Gift Exchange in the Phanariot Ceremonial Investiture

This current study looks at the gifts and insignia of power exchanged in the ritualistic context of the appointment of Phanariot *hospodars*¹³ in the provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia during the 18th and 19th centuries. Therefore, the research focuses on official documents that were used for organizing the Bucharest and Jassy part of the ceremonial, named *condică* or *pitac*¹⁴ on domestic chronicles produced by local boyars or merchants,¹⁵ on *Descriptio Moldaviae*, written by Dimitrie Cantemir the former *hospodar* of Moldavia, on the translated (transliterated) Ottoman manuscript published by H. DJ. Siruni,¹⁶ and on the edited description of Nicolae Sutu's autobiographical account.¹⁷ So far, visual sources have been overlooked by research. In an article published in 1927,¹⁸ Constantin Karadja drew attention to the reproduction of a photograph after a water-color painted by a Greek architect by the name of Marco Calfa, said to depict the

10 Zahariuc 2015, 311–69.

11 Rulers elected and appointed from the local elite of boyars, as opposed to the Phanariot ones with origins traced back to Phanar or the Dragomans; However, this delineation is a rather artificial one since the delegates discussed by Petronel Zahariuc are of Phanariot origin, and the act of having an official delegation sent to Constantinople only reinforces the framework of Ottoman-Moldavian rapports.

12 Vintilă-Ghițulescu 2022, 70.

13 Various sources tend to use alternatively the concepts of *hospodar*, *voyvoda*, or prince when relating to the official name of the office.

14 *Condică* is a term meaning registry, and *pitac* is an official act equivalent to a law used by Wallachian and Moldavian *voyvodas* for various purposes from appointing members of the local elite, boyars, in specific offices, set fixed prices-nart, organize official receptions for foreign envoys, etc.

15 Simionescu 1939.

16 Siruni 1941.

17 Păun 1997.

18 Karadja 1927, 57–9.

investiture ceremony of Constantin Ipsilanti. Karadja offers hardly any details on the provenance, stating that in 1904 the original watercolor was in the collection of his nephew Ianco Ioanidis, who worked as an architect in Constantinople. A few paintings¹⁹ by the Romanian artist Theodor Aman are important visual documents that show how Ottoman-Wallachian relations were reconceptualized as conflictual in the 19th century nationalist discourse; hence, various *hospodars* such as Michael the Brave or Stephen the Great were represented as heroes in opposition to the Muslim conquerors.

The main aspect of an approach combining both narrative and visual sources is that it emphasizes the need to go beyond the textual sources explored so far and the 19th century pejoratively constructed discourse of the Phanariots and discern how they add to the visual imagery of the written ones. Authors such as Viorel Panaite have relied on official correspondence of foreign travelers or diplomatic envoys when discussing the Phanariot investiture. Thus, I believe that the relevance of a discussion on the Wallachian and Moldavian produced sources in a cultural history framework would outline their unilateral approach in the ceremonial description. Moreover, the linguistic aspects of internalizing a significant quantity of Ottoman words reinforce the Phanariot's role as members of the Ottoman administration. Chronologically speaking, the sources are unevenly spread with *Descriptio Moldaviae* and Radu Popescu's chronicle covering the end of 17th century and the first decades of the 18th, and the Siruni edited Ottoman manuscript going as far as 1782. The Gheorgachi *condică*, the several *pitac* documents edited in the Urechia volumes, and the retinue description in the Nicolae Suțu autobiographical account focus on the last decades of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th.

The Romanian historiography on the topic of investiture ceremonials has mostly focused on the religious aspects, the funerary context,²⁰ the legal framework of the Ottoman-Wallachian and Moldavian rapports, and their public spectacle component.²¹ In his detailed analysis spanning over two centuries including the Phanariot ones, Radu G. Păun argues that the symbolical implications of the various representations of power in Wallachia and Moldavia can be perceived as a 'mise en scene du pouvoir'.²² Nathalie Rothman views them as dragoman intermediaries, following Jerouen Duindam who names them an intermediary trans-imperial group that provided interpreters, translators, spies between the Ottomans and European embassies²³. Christine Philiou builds on Duindam's argument on the position of the Phanariots in what she calls an 'imperial world in crisis': 'The process of integration, of which Phanariots were both the product and agents, was inadvertent in that individuals, groups, and institutions were growing increasingly dependent on each other without the aid of an explicit ideology of political

19 Theodor Aman, 'Vlad Țepeș și solii turci (1862–1863)', currently in the collection of the National Museum of Art of Romania, and Mihai Viteazul 'primind solii turci cu daruri din partea sultanului', in the collection of the Art Museum in Craiova, Romania.

20 Timotin 2019.

21 Vintilă-Ghițulescu, Willcocks 2007.

22 Păun 2007, 79–122.

23 Duindam 2019, 1096.

integration exposed from the central state.²⁴ Philiou addresses not only the ambivalent attitudes and roles played by the Phanariots in the Ottoman administrative system, but also emphasizes the significance of the two provinces, naming them the ‘twin Danubian principalities, power bases’ for their extensive networks. Theories regarding their roles in the nationalist movements of Southeastern Europe played on this exact difficulty of integrating a group that reached across the empire and into the Western European courts. One only needs to look at the 1821 Greek and Wallachian dynamics to observe how the Ottoman imperial response to the uprisings demonstrated their perception of the Phanariots as agents of Imperial Russia.²⁵ The perception of Phanariots as Ottoman officials with their own agenda has been previously explored in research, the 1992 MA thesis of Panayotis Papachristou even suggesting the existence of a three-pronged role of the Phanariots and interpreting their conformity to the Ottoman administration as a sign of Ottomanism. This Ottomanism did not come at odds with what the author considers as aspirations for a ‘Greek-Turkish condominium’.²⁶

Taking into consideration this specific situation of the Phanariots within the Ottoman system, I would like to investigate whether their ambivalence translated into a more complex ritual of investiture. Therefore, my paper aims to view the investiture ceremonial following certain conventions of representation and to track how the gifts and material culture exchanged in the process plays into the implementation and creation of these conventions. The concept of conventions of representations coined by Peter Burke for the uses of images as historical sources²⁷ facilitates a nuanced understanding of the dynamic of power transferred between the sultan and the throne contender. In this context, the concept of conventions of representation would be used to discuss the highly normative role played by the gifts and insignia of power displayed according to a specific structured ceremonial to emphasize the roles played by the various actors: the sultan, the Grand Vizier, the throne contender, the Ecumenical Patriarch.

Therefore, the focus of the current study on the gift exchange and on how the inhabitants of Bucharest and Jassy were spectators as well as participants in this dynamic would further emphasize the nuanced roles the Phanariots played both in the power dynamic of the imperial center and on the local political scene. The need to see and be seen is evident if we consider that the official written sources chronicling the ceremonies have a habit of describing each ceremony as being more glamorous than the previous one. Moreover, as Radu Păun mentioned, the decision to create a specific department (*Logofeția de obiceiri*) was an act intended to convert the ritual into a highly regulated ceremonial for the second part of the investiture meant to take place in Bucharest or Jassy. I hypothesize it can also be interpreted as either internalizing Ottoman customs or as an attempt to emphasize the legitimacy to rule. I would add that the known internal instability of both provinces and the strong impact of the boyar factions on the election of a *hospodar* are factors in viewing the investiture ceremonies as

24 Philiou 2009, 151–81.

25 Ilıcak 2021.

26 Papachristou 1988, 15.

27 Burke 2001.

a balancing act between the obedience to the sultan and the demonstration of his authority over the local elites.

Another issue I wish to address is the fragmentary state of research on the impact of the gifts received by the Phanariots on the material culture of the two provinces. Museums in Romania display a wide variety of artefacts that can be attributed to the Ottoman material culture, and a few publications address the Ottoman heritage especially in terms of textiles and accessories.²⁸ However, except for some pieces, many of them have not been traced back to their original owners. Their presence in Romanian museums and collections speaks to why we can view Wallachia and Moldavia²⁹ as part of the Ottoman material culture world; however, the research is still summary and fragmentary, with many pieces still labelled as being of Oriental or Balkan origin and incorrectly dated.³⁰ Therefore, this study will also attempt to outline the main categories of objects that were exchanged during the ceremony of initiation into a new office, objects which could offer new insights into the presence of Ottoman material culture in the two provinces.

3. Power Gifting, Symbolism, and Public Display

The power dynamics and gift giving in the Ottoman Empire is a complex subject and varies with each specific situation.³¹ As Jeroen Duindam points out ‘Ottoman *‘abdnâme* treaties could cover a striking variety of ‘tributaries’.³² Michał Wasiucionek, in turn, offers a different perspective on what he calls ‘a composite polity ruled by a maze of ad hoc arrangements and different circuits of power’ challenging the previous Romanian historiography on the Ottoman-Danubian principalities’ power dynamic.³³ Maria Pia Pedani adds another significant argument to the complexity of the Ottoman power system by emphasizing the shift from the *abdnâme* (mutual oaths) to the *berat* (imperial edicts) regulating the dynamic between the sultan and its subjects.³⁴ Moreover, a comparative perspective of studies dedicated³⁵ to the sultan’s ritualized accession demonstrates similarities with other ceremonial appointments to various administrative offices. Therefore, while the Ottoman system showed flexibility and variety when it came to the governance of its provinces, this paper argues against viewing the Wallachia and

28 On this particular matter, see authors such as Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, Camelia Ene, Alexandru Alexianu; Tănăsioiu 2015.

29 For a case study on 17th century Moldavia see Wasiucionek 2016, 39–78; for architecture see Coman 2021, 217–43.

30 The textile and accessories repertoire published by Maria-Camelia Ene 2016.

31 Although considered a marginal topic in the field of Ottoman studies there are numerous contributions on the topic and its various sources and methodological approaches such as Faroqhi 2011; Felek and Işkorkutan 2019; Murphey 2008; Reindl-Kiel 2005.

32 Duindam 2019, 1095.

33 Wasiucionek 2016, 58.

34 Pedani 2007, 193.

35 Brookes 1993, 1–22.

Moldavia provinces as exceptional within the imperial world due to the existence of common and replicated elements in both ceremonial and material culture. Rhoads Murphey contends that ‘visualization and personalization of sultanic rule played a key part at all levels in the subordination, incorporation and coordination of officials serving the dynasty as well as in the creation of a spirit of collectivism and cooperation that underpinned the everyday working of the state administrative apparatus.’³⁶

Differentiating between diplomatic gifts (*peşkeş*) and insignia of power (*hükümet ‘alâmetleri*), Maria Pia Pedani maps the types of items that were exchanged between the sultan and the Christian princes of the three provinces Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania in the 16th century. In Pedani’s opinion the diplomatic gifts were the ones offered by the subject whereas the insignia were the gifts that marked both obedience to the sultan’s authority, and the transfer of some of the sultan’s power to the subordinate. However, in Zeynep Sözen’s analysis of Dimitrie Cantemir’s *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Ottoman Empire*, *peşkeş* is marked as an unofficial gift, similarly to *bahşiş*.³⁷ Discussing the history and trans-national permeation of the Phanariot *hospodar*’s negative representations relating to the gift giving customs, Jacques Bouchard demonstrates how interconnected and transnational these narratives were especially in terms of the West-East dynamic.³⁸ It is noteworthy that the negative representations of both the official and the private sphere tend to mostly fixate on the corruption of the administrative apparatus during the 18th century, corruption that seemed to have a common denominator – gifts, specifically in the forms of *bahşiş*, *peşkeş*, or *rüşvet* (Ro. Peşceş).³⁹ Therefore, a discussion of the structure and symbolism of the Phanariot ceremonial investiture, focusing on the objects exchanged and the conventions used for each stage, should argue for a more nuanced approach of the perception of the systemic corruption of the Ottoman administration.

Thus far, the studies dedicated to the analysis of the Phanariot investiture ceremonies do not go into detail regarding the exchanged objects of power put on display. Aside from the caftan gifted by the sultan as a confirmation of the power transfer, Radu Păun only mentions the gifts offered in the context of the re-confirmation ceremony (*mucarer*) as an instrument used to balance the evident subordination to the Ottoman sultan. Moreover, Păun views the existence of significant differences between the two parts of the ceremony as a way to forgo the *de facto* power dynamic of the new ruler seen as a mere appointee of the sultan. Would this interpretation be also the reason behind the unilateral description of the investiture ceremonies in the 18th and

36 Murphey 2008, 207.

37 Sözen 2019, 39–51. On the meaning and differences between *bahşiş* and *peşkeş*, see also Lambton 1994, 149–51.

38 Bouchard 2014.

39 A current Marie Curie Individual Fellowship project, A Genealogy of Corruption. Administrative Malpractice and Political Modernization in Eighteenth Century Wallachia (Gen-Corr), aims to map the administrative malpractice in 18th century Wallachia. Moreover, these terms tend to be used alternatively in Romanian sources without too much of a differentiation between them.

beginning of the 19th century Wallachian and Moldavian chronicles? I argue in favor of interpreting the display of power, the gift giving ceremonies held in the capital cities, and the institutionalization of the ritual on a symbolical level as a balancing act to diminish the authority granted by the sultan and to reinforce the authority over the local elite and population. Radu Păun argues that, while *hospodars* previously relied on old familial or social bonds, Phanariots such as Nicolae Mavrocordat, with his Greek-Levantine roots, needed to create bonds with the countries they were meant to rule to fabricate social and power solidarities.⁴⁰ However, there are previous examples of the so-called *domni pământeni* (local *hospodars*) who were not members of the ruling families and who had to craft links with the local ruling aristocracy.⁴¹ Therefore, the “between” in the paper title refers to the fact that the Phanariot throne contender was not only meant to offer gifts to the officials in the Ottoman administration involved in the ceremonial, but also to the boyars part of the Istanbul retinues as well as to the local Wallachian and Moldavian elite.⁴²

When discussing the investiture ceremonials of the Phanariot period, it should be emphasized that one of the most quoted sources is *Descriptio Moldaviae* by Dimitrie Cantemir, published in Latin at the beginning of the 18th century. This source highlights the differences in the investiture of the Moldavian *hospodar* and the Phanariots by polarizing the power dynamic through a comparative discourse of “before” and “after” the so-called Phanariot regime. Cantemir, stresses the negative perception of the Phanariot investiture gift exchange in terms of systemic corruption⁴³ when describing the situations where gifts were used to tilt the Grand Vizier’s decision. However, he later adds that the gifts stipulated in the highly ritualized ceremonial were previously agreed upon in several talks between the throne contender and the Vizier.⁴⁴ Cantemir’s condemning attitude towards the practice of nominating the Phanariot *hospodars* as further proof of their corruption could be interpreted in the context of his collaboration with the Academy in Berlin. Stating that Cantemir might even be seen as a precursor of the Romanian (Moldavian) nationalism born and educated in the Ottoman lands, Michiel Leezenberg addresses Cantemir’s shifting loyalties and place in the Ottoman court.⁴⁵ Cantemir’s discourse on the Phanariot investiture as being corrupt and ridden with malpractice may also be understood in the context of another work

40 Păun 2007, 95.

41 One of the most known examples is that of Neagoe Basarab or Ștefan Cantacuzino, member of the Greek-Levantine Cantacuzino family. Not to mention that we could view the Phanariots as instrumental in diminishing the internal conflicts for power in the two provinces when it came to nominating a new ruler from the local political aristocracy.

42 Siruni 1941, 34. Cantemir 2007, 209; Păun 1997, 70–3.

43 Sözen 2019, 40.

44 Cantemir 2007, 212.

45 Leezenberg 2012, 246–47. Leezenberg discusses some of Cantemir’s works such as the *Historia incrementorum atque decrementorum Aulae Othomanicae* in the framework on an Orientalist intellectual production of knowledge. Could we view the *Descriptio Moldaviae* part dedicated to the Phanariot investiture ceremonial in a similar framework?

published in 1705, the *Istoria Ieroglifică*, an allegorical tale, openly critical of the Ottoman rulers, about the oppressive rule and the financial extortion used by the boyars.

Cantemir states that the attributes of power were gifted to the new ruler after the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople had performed the anointment liturgy. He outlines that the contender was required to offer a certain amount of money and several gifts to the intermediaries that facilitated his nomination (*peşkeş*).⁴⁶ Therefore, the gifts were exchanged under the impression of reciprocity. On the third day, the new *hospodar* received the two Ottoman standards (*tūğs*) and the banner of the *sancak* (or governor). These gifted insignias of power were then paraded across the city to the palace of the new ruler in a magnificent retinue. The two standards and the banner were accompanied by a *mehterhâne* (Cantemir speaks of a *Tubulchana* or Imperial Music), which acted as both a gift and an obligation since the new Phanariot *hospodar* was mandated to allow the Ottoman marching band to play during the procession to his new capital and at a certain time of day during his reign. Cantemir makes a point to outline the privilege of receiving a military orchestra by stating that it was only granted to the Princes of Wallachia and Moldavia.⁴⁷

The rituals performed in Istanbul and Bucharest or Jassy that signify affiliation, submission, and sovereignty were aimed at both the secular and the religious power. Allegiance was pledged before the Vizier, the sultan, and God in Istanbul, while in Bucharest and Jassy to the sultan and God.⁴⁸ The symbolical claim of territory attributed to Byzantine ceremonies of power and ritualized in both Istanbul and the two capital cities can be seen as perpetuating the post-Byzantine Wallachian and Moldavian heritage as well as building rapport with the Ottoman Empire, that had constructed its rituals using the same legacy. While discussing the sultan's procession through Istanbul as a 'means for the new ruler to stake his claim to his inheritance by travelling through it to receive obeisance',⁴⁹ Douglas S. Brookes addresses the issue of the common Byzantine heritage and outlines certain elements replicated in other investiture ceremonials. In turn, Romanian conventional historiography has used the Byzantine component to argue for the distinctiveness of Wallachia and Moldavia in the Ottoman system.

As research has already shown, the Ottoman investiture ceremonials have molded symbols and practices from Central Asian, Persian, Byzantine, and Islamic cultures into one that was replicated and adapted to specific contexts. For example, the act of bestowing a symbolic sword to the new ruler seems to have a Central Asian, Turkman root, but at the same time also flourished in Mongol and other Islamic courts.⁵⁰ While the use of the sword and the turban adorned with two or three jeweled aigrettes with a feather are reserved for the sultan, the Phanariot ceremonies used the *kouka* and the

46 It is significant to note that even Wallachian and Moldavian sources do not clearly delineate between the specific roles of *başış*, *rüşvet* or *peşkeş*.

47 On the public display of these symbols of authority, see Alaiulu la intrarea lui Ipsilante. 3 februarie in Urechia, 1892. Vol. II, 10–3.

48 Philliou 2009, 161.

49 Brookes 1993, 13.

50 Brookes 1993, 13.

shaving of the beard, which afterwards was grown accordance with the Ottoman court custom of the *tesrih-i lihye*.⁵¹ Additionally, I would also include the caftan bestowing, the shaving of the beard, and the sharing of the food from the *hospodar's* table with members of the political and ecclesiastic elite, when they took up office in Bucharest and Jassy, as elements that were replicated from the Ottoman court ceremonial.

The ritualized meal at the Topkapı Sarayı, held the day after the Grand Vizier's ceremony and the Orthodox Patriarch's blessing, has reverberated across the Ottoman administration and its presence in Phanariot society reinforces the argument of seeing the Danubian Principalities as part of the Ottoman power system. In Ottoman culture accepting food from the sultan is an instrument of power that signified accepting his authority and that declared loyalty to him.⁵² The use of food and beverages in the investiture ceremonial also included the coffee and sharbat served in the *Kibaya* (the deputy of the vizier) chambers. While consuming these beverage offerings, the new *hospodar* received another beautiful and exquisitely adorned horse from the vizier's stables. The reading of the pact, which regulated their official rapport, would follow the sultan gifting the *hil'at* and *kouka* to the *hospodar*, both symbols of authority indicating the transfer of power from the sultan to the Phanariot.

An overview of edited collections of documents, published in Romania at the end of the 19th century and the beginning and end of the 20th century, emphasizes the accent placed on both the public display and the social and political order of the Phanariot rituals. Vasile Alexandrescu Urechia's collection, edited in 1892,⁵³ reproduces a significant number of these public displays of power starting with Alexandru Ipsilanti's solemn entrance in Bucharest in 1775. Aside from the precise order of the retinue, where the participants were given specific roles and performative acts, the documents offer an insight into how the gifts of power were displayed in the capital cities of Bucharest and Jassy. In the case of Alexandru Ipsilanti's retinue, the insignia of power were displayed as follows: the *spatar* (sword-bearer, commander of the army) would carry and display the sword and the *topuz*, the Divan *vataf* (*ketbüdâ*) would follow with the *kouka* and the arrow. These items were immediately accompanied by the 'princely flag depicting Saints Constantine and Helen and the holy cross on one side, and on the other side the princely mark, the imperial *sandjak*'.⁵⁴ What is significant to note in the documents regarding the Wallachian or the Moldavian ceremonials is that there are frequent mentions of a separate retinue for the lady and the other female figures of Phanariot society.

In the third volume of the Urechia documents collection there is a highly detailed account of the Phanariot retinue, which describes the members of each administrative office, each participant of the various social classes of the Wallachian and Moldavian society, and most notably their order which had been established beforehand. Not only

51 Brookes 1993, 14.

52 Philliou 2009, 162.

53 Urechia, volumes II, III, and IV, reproduce various examples of these retinues, while stating the oldest recorded one is that of Alexandru Ipsilanti.

54 Urechia 1892, 14.

is the quantity of details significant, but also the power transfer through gift exchanges between the new Phanariot *hospodar* and the members of local secular and religious administration is more evident:

The second day after the enthronement, Mavrogheni called Gregorie the Metropolitan and Filaret the Bishop of Râmnic, and Cosma, the Bishop of Buzău, at the princely table, and he feasted with them, honouring them and clothing them with fur lined clothes, expensive, princely. And on the third day, he called the grand boyars, he feasted with them at the princely table (*masa domnească*), he offered them positions in the princely Divan (*domnesc*).⁵⁵

The act of the new *hospodar* to share a meal with the local religious and secular power representatives and to grant them gifts and power may be interpreted as an imitation of the Istanbul meal ceremony of the sultan. A more plausible interpretation is that these actions were a way to balance the sultan's transfer of power and to display authority in front of the local aristocracy to avoid possible future conflicts that would end in an abrupt dethronement at the hands of the boyar representatives.

In the introduction to the chronicle of Gheorgachi, Dan Simionescu mentions the existence of 'Târigrad (Istanbul) ceremonial treaties in Greek and Turkish (Ottoman)' that dealt in great detail with the investiture rituals of the Wallachian and the Moldavian *hospodars*.⁵⁶ To complete the image of the whole ceremonial, Dan Simionescu uses the Adamescu edition of Dimitrie Cantemir's work to offer a Moldavian comparative reference. However, the Gheorgachi chronicle, edited by Dan Simionescu in 1939, bears similarities with Cantemir's account as it outlines the "before" and "after" of the Phanariots investiture ceremonials discernible in the example of Constantin Brâncoveanu's investiture, where everything took place in Bucharest. In the 1975 edition of the *Cronica anonimă a Moldovei* (Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia), we find a short description of the third governorship of Mihai Racoviță (1660–1744) in Moldavia which gives several details about the investiture, including the caftan received from the Grand Vizier, the *kouka* from the sultan (Ro *împărat*), adding that the ceremony wasn't expensive.⁵⁷ The description of the investiture ceremonial is quickly followed by details of natural disasters, a severe draught, and a defeat of the Ottomans by the Habsburg army.

Theodor Aman offers two visual interpretations of the Ottoman-Wallachian rapports with the previously mentioned paintings. In *Solii turci aduc daruri lui Mihai Viteazul din partea sultanului Mehmed al II-lea*, Aman attempted to express the distinctiveness of the Romanian provinces within the power dynamic of the Ottoman system. However, he succeeded in offering an interesting visual source on the ceremonial and gifts of power used at the end of the 15th century in the Ottoman Empire. In the painting, the gifts and insignias of power, displayed on velvet cushions, are brought by the Ottoman officials to Michael the Brave and offered with a bow which Aman had constructed to be

55 Urechia 1892, vol. III, 21.

56 Simionescu 1939, 51.

57 Simionescu 1975, 74.

a symbol of Wallachian heroism and prowess. The previously mentioned watercolor, reproduced in a 1927 article published in a Romanian periodical,⁵⁸ was titled *Ceremonia de investitură a lui Constantin Vodă Ipsilanti*. Its composition displayed a series of numbers giving the impression that it had been accompanied by a text. The scene does not give any indication whether it depicted the Istanbul or the Wallachian part of the ritual; it is likely that the accompanying inscription would have shed some light on this matter. The image shows the investiture retinue, arranged on a single, winding row as it enters a building featuring bow windows. A further and in-depth inquiry into this particular visual source may facilitate a better understanding of this complex ceremonial.

4. Caftans, Horses, Food, and Weapons: Material Culture and Symbols of Power

The public aspect of the ritualized ceremonial not only conferred legitimacy to the new ruler, but also confirmed the already existing political and social connections. These connections, illustrated by the social, ethnic, and economic composition of the Phanariot retinue, were emphasized through the objects used in the ceremonial. The object's provenance or the fine and precious materials it was made from contributed to the overall representation and display of power. Maria Pia Pedani offers insight into what constituted a diplomatic gift, and what an *irsāliye* and *hükümet 'alāmetleri* were.⁵⁹ Given the nature of the commercial relations between the sultan and the empire's provinces, it comes as no surprise to find packhorses, prized steeds, peregrine falcons, and other animals offered by the Wallachian or Moldavian *hospodars*.

Murphey's take on how the sultan authority was projected and delegated among various members of the Ottoman administration, including provincial governors such as the Phanariots, outlines once more how the various items offered were replicated to act as a locus in the sultan's absence and as acts of submission. Using the example of the *kapaniçe* (an elaborate fur-lined robe) and of the *hil'at*, Rhoads Murphey emphasizes the use of textiles as markers of specific offices, and how wearing them elicited feelings of pride and 'gratitude for their bestowal revolved implicitly around the person of the sultan, and collection of this and other insignia of office in person was the usual expectation'.⁶⁰ One of the recurring investiture gifts during the many stages of the ceremony consisted of a prized horse. The head of the royal stables prepared 'an Arabian horse adorned with a golden harness glistening with precious stones and a wrap craft fully embroidered with gold and silver, hanging from its saddle on the left the sword, and on the right the topuz, or the soldiers mace'⁶¹ while the throne contender waited for an official departure approval. The newly appointed Phanariot *hospodar* was escorted to the Kara Eflak or Boğdan Sarayı, two private Istanbul residences offered to the throne contenders, in a complex ceremonial and with a retinue which followed specific

58 Karadja 1927, 59.

59 Pedani 2007, 196.

60 Murphey 2008, 228.

61 Cantemir 2007, 219. See also Păun 1997, 67.

Ottoman customs. The members of that retinue received their usual gifts at the end of the ritual. Once again, the gifted power through highly symbolical objects is mandated to imply a form of reciprocity in the gift giving / gift receiving practice.⁶²

Placed at the center of this ritualized gift and power exchange is the *hil'at*, mostly known in Romanian historiography as the caftan. Amanda Phillips argues for the origins of caftan as being in the Byzantine tradition of the ceremonial dress, with roots going back to Antiquity.⁶³ However, Brookes also references the role the Central Asian ceremonies of *ikat* offering have had in the sultan's investiture. In her study on the symbolical place of the *hil'at* in the Ottoman universe, Phillips emphasizes that the '*hil'ats* played a starring role in a cosmos of highly evolved and formalized visual cues signaled by personal attire and accessories.'⁶⁴ In the case of the Phanariot *hospodar*, the attire included the *kouka*, shoes and boots, sashes, swords, and horse equipment, while the different fabrics and furs that were used in making the textile pieces signaled his political role.

Phillips maintains that with the offering of the *hil'at* the sultan not only gifts a fragment of his authority but also compels his subject to wear a garment of his choosing, thereby configuring a form of a political and social contract. In this contract, the power is exchanged in return for obedience and loyalty. Phillips' study hypothesizes that the donning of the *hil'at* was meant to obscure individuality. However, while observing Ottoman court customs, Cantemir offers an explanation that further highlights the anthropological aspect of the ceremony. According to the former Moldavian *hospodar* the gifted *hil'at* was worn over the existent clothes of the throne contender, consequently creating a new meaning where the old would continue to function under the protection and authority of the new. Moreover, the new throne contender was offered up to four *hil'ats*, following a specific order involving both the Grand Vizier and the sultan. Sibel Alpaslan Arça's take on the meaning of *hil'at*, with its translation from Arabic that means a caftan or a piece of clothing one on top of the other, gives a more mundane explanation and emphasizes the semantics of textile exchange.⁶⁵ The 17th century sumptuary laws mentioned by Sibel Alpaslan Arça outline that *hil'at* ceremonial gifting was not only an attribute of the sultan but could have been performed by the Grand Vizier and other high-ranking officials. 'Whoever wears a *hil'at* bestowed by His Majesty the Sultan of the universe for an office, it was eternal law that he wore a *hil'at* from the representative of state.'⁶⁶

From the three caftans or robes of honor (*hil'at*) received by the Phanariot contender to the *kouka*, the *sancak* standards, the horse covers, and the elaborate ceremonial

62 Both the Siruni edited Ottoman manuscript and the 19th century investiture of Alexandru Suțu described in Radu Păun's article while pointing to slight variations over time in the order of the ceremony or the nature of gifts exchanged, the gifts were exchanged not only between the throne contender and the sultan / Grand Vizier, but also with the boyars.

63 Phillips 2015, 116.

64 Phillips 2015, 117.

65 Alpaslan Arça 2008, 46.

66 Alpaslan Arça 2008, 54.

clothes of the participants⁶⁷ that are the most evident part, the court ceremonials often imply the use of other types of textiles. Nurhan Atasoy has emphasized the use of wall hangings, curtains, carpets, and ground coverings as a means to convey magnificence and a certain discourse on power. In *Ipek, Imperial Ottoman Silks and Velvet* the studies break down the types of materials used in the Ottoman rituals and ceremonials and describe velvet (*kaṭiḫe*), multicoloured brocade textiles, and the use of *serāser*, the cloth of gold and silver.⁶⁸

While research on Ottoman textiles in Romanian museum collections has included dye and fabric analysis,⁶⁹ a complete survey of the extant pieces in museum collections has not yet been undertaken. The difficulty in tracing pieces in Romanian museum collections that could have been used in investiture ceremonies magnifies when taking into consideration that the custom of *ḫil'at* bestowing was adapted to various occasions; thus, attempts to delineate on a stylistic base have yet to produce results. The Phanariot *hospodar* received three *ḫil'ats* while the Grand Vizier was granted two – one lined with fur, the other without fur. To meet the growing demand for *ḫil'at* a special group from the court tailors (*ḫayyāṭin-i ḫāṣṣa*) was designated to make them; they were known as *ḫayyāṭin-i ḫil'at*.⁷⁰

Dimitrie Cantemir further stresses the role played by the Grand Vizier in naming the new ruler and in the bestowing of the *ḫil'at* ceremonial: ‘That being said, at the order of the Vizier, the *Kapıcılar kabıyası* brings the pieces of clothing called Chillat (Cantemir’s appropriation of the term *ḫil'at*) and he first gives it to the Prince to kiss it, and then he dresses the Prince with it, over his other clothes.’⁷¹ While wearing the received caftan, the new ruler kissed the hem of the Grand Vizier’s attire thus offering his allegiance and acknowledging the significance of the clothing as a symbolic gift and an instrument of power. *Descriptio Moldaviae* also seems to place textiles at the center of the ceremonial of investiture even in the declaration of religious allegiance segment:

Whomever sees the Prince passing, be it Turk, be it Christian, even if he was sitting in his shop, he must get on his feet and, crossing his arms on his chest, to bow his head and even if he would pass by the janissaries’ gate, all that would be there guarding are arranged in a line by their Prefects, up until the Prince has passed, and they bow to him with their head, just as they would to the Vizier, leaving their front part of the hem of the clothing, that is to them the sign of the greatest bow, showing that they offer to the Prince the greatest honour, so that they must stand before him with their feet covered and they cannot move unless he orders it ⁷².

67 The edited collections of documents by Urechia further elaborate on the importance of the clothing worn by during the ceremonial entrance of the Phanariot *voyvoda* in Bucharest and Jassy, signaling the internalization of Ottoman sartorial customs in terms of the office held by Wallachian and Moldavian political elite.

68 Atasoy et al. 2001.

69 Petrovicu et al. 2017, 18–29.

70 Atasoy 2001.

71 Cantemir 2007, 213.

72 Cantemir 2007, 214.

What is significant in this small fragment narrating the expected behavior from the inhabitants of Istanbul, and from the members of the Janissary corps is the use of textiles to signal submission but, most importantly, the emphasis on that being the submission shown to the Vizier.

The audience with the sultan, from whom the Phanariot *hospodar* received the *kouka* with the customary *sorguç*, was the high point of the Istanbul ceremonial.⁷³ After the bestowing of the insignia of power, the sultan presented the new ruler with the following: a horse adorned with a harness embellished with gold and precious stones, a carpet sown with gold and silver thread, a sword and the *topuz* (mace made from precious metals and decorated with precious stones). ‘If the emperor allows it, *Kapıcılar kahyası*, shows the Prince the will of the sultan, and orders *Muhzur ağası* to put on the head of the Prince the „Cuca” – it being a *sorguç* made from ostrich feathers craft fully adorned. The Prince thus adorned is dressed by the Grand Defterdar with a caftan, and to his boyars gifts 27 caftans according to rank.’⁷⁴ The presence of the *sorguç* and *kouka* is attested in previous centuries as being worn by the Wallachian and the Moldavian *hospodars* (i.e., Michael the Brave in 16th century) while their meaning has varied. Whereas Dimitrie Cantemir names the *kouka* as the headgear worn specifically by the janissaries, David S. Brookes states that the *sorguç* legitimizes power with its double heritage placing it under the auspicious sign of the huma bird. Brookes goes on to compare the shape of the *sorguç* with the shape of the bird, stating that it is an instance of a man-made item imitating nature: ‘From its central cluster of gems – the body of the bird – sprouted small sprays of feathers and rows of precious stones which arched gracefully around the turban as would wings.’⁷⁵

A significant aspect of the investiture ceremonial of Alexandru Suțu refers to what happens with the *kouka* and the *kapaniçe* once the Phanariot is back in his Boğdan Sarayı,

*le prince entre dans sa chambre, dépose la kouka et la cabanitz, prend le bonnet de zibeline et le pardessus de saison et congédie avec le cérémonial usité les officiers du palais qui l'ont accompagné. La kouka, couverte d'un voile rouge, la cabanitz et le serassere sont places au coin principal.*⁷⁶

Could the use of the *kapaniçe* instead of the *hil'at* along the act of taking the gifts from the sultan once back in a private space and replacing them with other clothing have signaled some shifts in the transfer of power in the 19th century? As research has shown both the *kapaniçe* and the *hil'at* garments made from sophisticated textiles, one of them lined with fur, had the same function - to project on the wearer the sultan's authority associated with the new rank.

Once the audience with the sultan was over and the insignia of power were bestowed on the throne contender, receiving the final blessing from the Vizier along with another

73 Păun 1997, 70–3.

74 Cantemir 2007, 218.

75 Brookes 1992, 14.

76 Păun 1997, 73.

caftan⁷⁷ signaled the final display of power in Istanbul and the beginning of the initiation journey towards the actual seat of power. A white flag symbolizing submission and peace was placed between the two *tūgs*, but after the Moldavian / Wallachian cavalry and a band of Christian music. Seven of the Phanariot's *hospodar* horses followed the accompanying boyars who were surrounded by Ottoman *cavuşlar*. Riding on his horse, the Phanariot *hospodar* wore the princely caftan and *kouka* and had several Ottoman representatives by his side carrying three red *sancak* raised flags while the middle one featured an *alem*, an Ottoman standard. The *mehterhâne* or *tabulchana* intended for announcing the passing of the retinue followed by various low-level road companions closed the entire public display of power.

One of the main reasons that this paper has focused on Wallachian / Moldavian produced sources, with the Siruni edition of the Ottoman manuscript compilation acting as a cross-reference to *Descriptio Moldaviae*, is to observe whether there were changes in the material culture exchanged or in the stages of the ritual. While the *pitac* documents edited by the nationalist Urechia and *Descriptio Moldaviae* speak about the grandeur of the ceremonial and the authority it inspired both in Istanbul and in each of the capital cities, the Siruni fragment no XXI about the 1782 investiture of Alexandru Mavrocordat mentions the presence of the ambassador from Bukhara in the same audience with the sultan but for a different matter.⁷⁸ Not only that, but it seems that the Bukhara ambassador had been received by the sultan before the Phanariot. As mentioned above, the Alexandru Suțu investiture at the beginning of the 19th century uses the *kapaniçe* instead of the *hil'at* whereas the Mihai Racoviță investiture appears to have been inexpensive. Perhaps the ceremonial had been reduced as it was his third investiture, while the replacement of the type of garment might be interpreted as announcing shifts in the Ottoman administration. As Radu Păun's study shows similar discrepancies can be seen in diplomatic reports and foreign envoys accounts.⁷⁹

According to Maria Pia Pedani among the material culture of the investiture ceremony are the utensils employed in the parts of the ritual having to do with the making and drinking of coffee, described in various sources. A significant number of them, including domestic chronicles, place the offering of coffee, sweets and other beverages after the religious ritual performed in the Istanbul palace of the Patriarch with the new Phanariot *hospodar* going as far as offering small customary gifts to the Prefects. The ritualistic consumption of coffee, beverages and food seems to permeate in other customary rituals.⁸⁰ A significant emphasis was placed on the musical aspects of the investiture ceremony in the studies published by both John Plemmenos and Nicolae Gheorghîță.⁸¹ Specifically, the study authored by John Plemmenos outlines the symbolical implications of specific sounds and music in the metaphorical taking of ownership of the land, and presents the entire ceremonial as a rite of passage, where music marked

77 Named by Dimitrie Cantemir as the farewell caftan *Izn Caftan*.

78 Siruni 1941, 28.

79 Păun 1997, 67.

80 Popescu 1847, 21–62, 93–178.

81 Gheorghîță 2015.

each stage.⁸² In my opinion, the same anthropological perspective may be applied to documents, meals and foodstuffs, as well as objects involved in the ceremonial.

To conclude, the current renewed interest in the Phanariots of both the Romanian and international academia speaks to the complexity of these Ottoman Christian subjects. The evidence brought forth in this study, that presents the gifts and insignias of power within the framework of an investiture ceremonial as acts and instruments of power transfer and submission to a higher authority, reflect on a less explored aspect of Ottoman material culture present in 18th and 19th century Wallachia and Moldavia. Moreover, one could also argue that, while it outlines their specific place in the Ottoman power system, it also demonstrates that they are embedded in the customary Ottoman power rituals. The continued use of similar objects of power before and after the so-called Phanariot regime is another argument in favor of re-evaluating this particular group with the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries seen as a distinctive historical interval, and Wallachia and Moldavia as having a special status in the Ottoman Empire.

Additionally, while substantial and valuable, the research dedicated so far to the topic of ceremonies is still fragmentary. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to explore the investiture ceremonies as both a power-balancing act and a significant piece of the puzzle in the Ottoman system, which allows for a more stratified and regional approach regarding the topic. Additionally, the shared legacies in the Ottoman Empire are emphasized by outlining the Byzantine component in the sultan's accession customs rather than by viewing the Byzantine anointment ceremonies used by the Wallachian and Moldavian *hospodar* as a sign of distinctiveness. The Phanariot investiture ceremonies are yet another instance of the center-periphery dynamic in the Ottoman Empire. From the objects of prestige that were internalized in the Wallachian and Moldavian local power system to customs and foodstuffs the investiture was a complex apparatus for the display of authority which also signaled obedience to a higher power.

The similar gifts and gifting patterns from the Siruni edition of the Ottoman manuscript pushes the chronological limit back to 1683, in tandem with the Papachristou's timeline, while Petronel Zahariuc's analysis of the 1822 Moldavian delegation to Istanbul argues for going beyond 1821. Additionally, a more nuanced view of Nathalie Rothman's assimilation of the Phanariots in the diverse category of dragomans warrants a rethink in terms of the political role they played as the rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia and as de facto Ottoman officials. The gifts exchanged between the parties involved in the ceremonial have been used as arguments in seeing the Ottoman administration as corrupt, which has highlighted the existence of books of ceremonies (the Siruni manuscript being a compilation of excerpts from these books) and of strict rules on gift exchange and power transference. As such, this calls for a more nuanced perspective. While the 18th century investiture ceremonies of the Phanariots demonstrate an evident emphasis placed on the public display of the power insignia gifted by the sultan and the Grand Vizier, the material culture exchanged seems to follow three main categories already present in the previous centuries: textiles, prized horses, and utensils associated with foodstuffs. Another aspect that research has also emphasized and needs further

82 Plemmenos 2013, 351–65.

inquiry is that not all the Phanariot appointees were of Greek origin. Some have been traced to local Wallachian and Moldavian boyar families and others secured the local loyalties via strategic marriage alliances.

The impact of these investiture gifts and insignia can be observed in the artefacts present in Romanian museum's collections. For instance, the Bucharest Municipality Museum's collection includes *tûgs*, tableware, Ottoman weapons and clothing items, the National Museum of Art of Romania exhibits several clothing items and accessories such as *pafta* (a form of belt buckles in Tr. *kemer tokası*), an Ottoman tent is listed among the collections of the Palace of Culture in Jassy, and so on. The writer Nicolae Filimon in his *Ciocoi vechi și noi* (Old and New Upstarts) novel provides a description of the palace used by Ioan Gheorghe Caradja (1812–1818) as he served as the Phanariot *hos-podar* of Wallachia and numbers prized Arabian horses among the animals present. Therefore, the research in this study can be further elaborated in inventorying the Ottoman material culture in present-day Romania, and correctly dating it and attributing it to specific ethnic and geographical parts of the Ottoman Empire.

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